

Amendments to the Claims

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions and listings of claims in the application:

1-84. (cancelled)

85. (Currently amended) In a vendor-controlled centralized postage-issuing computer system, a method of processing a mail piece, comprising:

receiving, at the vendor-controlled centralized postage-issuing computer system, an indexing tracking ID request and a first postage indicium request, directed from an end user computer;

allocating an indexing tracking ID for the end user computer;

generating data corresponding to a postage indicium at a vendor-controlled centralized postage issuing computer system in response to the postage indicium request, the postage indicium being associated with a mail piece and configured for processing through the United States Postal Service (USPS), wherein the data corresponding to the postage indicium comprises a digital signature derived from the indexing tracking ID;

storing the data corresponding to the postage indicium within a database of the vendor-controlled centralized postage issuing computer system such that [[an]] the indexing tracking ID is associated with the data corresponding to the postage indicium and the indexing tracking ID is usable as an index for the data corresponding to the postage indicium;

~~transmitting the indexing tracking ID and the data corresponding to the postage indicium from the vendor-controlled centralized postage issuing computer system to an~~ to the end user computer;

receiving, at the vendor-controlled centralized postage issuing computer system, a second postage indicium request, ~~directed~~ transmitted from the USPS, wherein the second postage indicium request contains the indexing tracking ID; ~~and~~

retrieving the data corresponding to the postage indicium from the database based on the indexing tracking ID received from the USPS.

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Docket No. : 703602.2

86. (Previously pending) The method of claim 85, wherein the indexing tracking ID is unique within the USPS for at least one year.

87. (Previously pending) The method of claim 85, wherein the data corresponding to the postage indicium comprises data representative of one or more items selected from the group consisting of postage amount, date and time of postage information creation, service class, optional data advance, and delivery zip code.

88. (Cancelled)

89. (Previously pending) The method of claim 88, further comprising transmitting the digital signature with the data corresponding to the postage indicium from the vendor-controlled centralized postage issuing computer system to the end user computer.

90. (Previously pending) The method of claim 89, wherein the digital signature is derived by applying a private key to the data corresponding to the postage indicium.

91. (Previously pending) The method of claim 90, wherein the digital signature is derived within a physically secure coprocessor device.

92. (Cancelled)

93. (Currently amended) The method of claim [[92]] 85, wherein the indexing tracking ID request is a first indexing tracking ID request, the method further comprising:
sending, from the vendor-controlled centralized postage-issuing computer system, a second indexing tracking ID request, which is directed to the USPS; and
receiving, at the vendor-controlled centralized postage-issuing computer system, the indexing tracking ID from the USPS in response to the second indexing tracking ID request, prior to allocating the indexing tracking ID for the end user computer.

94. (Cancelled)
95. (Previously pending) The method of claim 85, further comprising:
transmitting, from the vendor-controlled centralized postage-issuing computer system to the USPS, the data corresponding to the postage indicium after retrieving the data corresponding to the postage indicium.
96. (Previously pending) The method of claim 85, further comprising:
generating a plurality of postage indicium data sets, each data set comprising data corresponding to a postage indicium associated with a mail piece;
associating a plurality of indexing tracking IDs with the plurality of postage indicium data sets; and
storing the plurality of postage indicium data sets within the database.
97. (Currently amended) The method of claim ~~[[85]]~~ 88, wherein the indexing tracking ID is a USPS delivery confirmation code.
98. (Previously pending) The method of claim 85, wherein the postage indicium request is received from the USPS over the internet.
99. (Previously pending) The method of claim 98, further comprising transmitting the retrieved data corresponding to the postage indicium from the vendor-controlled centralized postage-issuing system to the USPS over the internet.
100. (Previously pending) The method of claim 99, wherein the indexing tracking ID and the data corresponding to the postage indicium are transmitted to the end user computer in a format that enables the end user computer to print a one-dimensional bar code representative of the indexing tracking ID and a two-dimensional bar code representative of the data corresponding to the postage indicium.

101. (Previously pending) The method of claim 100, wherein transmitting the retrieved data corresponding to the postage indicium comprises transmitting the retrieved data corresponding to the postage indicium over the internet such that the data can be displayed at the USPS.

102. (Previously pending) The method of claim 101, wherein the postage indicium comprises either a meter number or an account number that is not part of the indexing tracking ID.

103. (Previously pending) The method of claim 99, wherein the data corresponding to the postage indicium is a subset of a larger data set corresponding to the postage indicium.

104. (Previously pending) The method of claim 102, wherein the indexing tracking ID and the data corresponding to the postage indicium are transmitted from the vendor-controlled centralized postage issuing computer system to the end user computer over the internet and the postage indicium request is received from the USPS over the internet.

105. (Previously pending) The method of claim 85, wherein the data corresponding to the postage indicium comprises a meter number or an account number that is not part of the indexing tracking ID.

106-123. (Cancelled)

124. (Currently amended) A vendor-controlled centralized postage-issuing computer system communicatively coupled with an end user computer and a United States Postal Service (USPS) computer system, comprising:

- data processing circuitry;
- a database;

a tracking identification string allocation module, operable with the data processing circuitry, programmed to allocate an indexing tracking ID to one of the end user computers in response to an indexing tracking ID request from the one end user computer;

a postage indicium generation module, operable with the data processing circuitry, programmed to generate data corresponding to a postage indicium associated with a mail piece in response to a request from the end user computer, wherein the postage indicium is configured for processing through the USPS and wherein the generated data comprises a digital signature derived from the indexing tracking ID;

an indexing module, operable with the data processing circuitry, programmed to associate [[an]] the indexing tracking ID with the data corresponding to the postage indicium such that the data corresponding to the postage indicium is indexed by the indexing tracking ID; and

a database management module, operable with the data processing circuitry, programmed to store the data corresponding to the postage indicium within the database, and programmed to retrieve, based on the indexing tracking ID, the data corresponding to the postage indicium from the database in response to a postage indicium request received from the USPS computer system, wherein the postage indicium request comprises the indexing tracking ID.

125. (Previously presented) The computer system of claim 124, wherein the indexing tracking ID is unique within the USPS for at least one year.

126. (Previously presented) The computer system of claim 124, wherein the data corresponding to the postage indicium comprises data representative of one or more items selected from the group consisting of postage amount, date and time of postage information creation, service class, optional data advance, and delivery zip code.

127. (Currently amended) The computer system of claim 124, wherein the postage indicium generation module further comprises:

a digital signature generation submodule, operable with the data processing circuitry, programmed to generate [[a]] the digital signature; and

an association submodule, operable with the data processing circuitry, ~~for associating~~ programmed to associate the digital signature with the data corresponding to the postage indicium, wherein the database management module is programmed to store the digital signature with the data corresponding to the postage indicium within the database.

128. (Previously presented) The computer system of claim 127, wherein the digital signature generation submodule is programmed to apply a private key to the data corresponding to the postage indicium to generate the digital signature.

129. (Previously presented) The computer system of claim 128, wherein the data processing circuitry comprises a physically secure coprocessor device.

130. (Previously presented) The computer system of claim 129, wherein the digital signature generation submodule is operable with the physically secure coprocessor device.

131. (Previously presented) The computer system of claim 124, further comprising a communications module operable with the data processing circuitry to transmit a request for the indexing tracking ID to the USPS computer system, to receive the indexing tracking ID from the USPS computer system in response to the request for the indexing tracking ID, to transmit the indexing tracking ID and the data corresponding to the postage indicium to the end user computer, and to receive the postage indicium request containing the indexing tracking ID from the USPS.

132. (Previously presented) The computer system of claim 124, further comprising a tracking number request module, operable with the data processing circuitry, programmed to generate a tracking number request for transmission to the USPS computer system.

133-137. (Cancelled)

138. (Previously presented) The computer system of claim 124, wherein the data corresponding to the postage indicium comprises a meter number or an account number that is not part of the indexing tracking ID.

139. (Previously presented) The computer system of claim 124, wherein the indexing tracking ID is a USPS delivery confirmation code.

140. (New) The vendor-controlled centralized postage-issuing computer system of claim 124, further comprising:

a transaction database comprising a set of indexing tracking IDs; and

a comparison module, operable with the data processing circuitry, the comparison module being programmed to compare the indexing tracking ID from the USPS postage indicium request with the set of indexing tracking IDs.

141. (New) The vendor-controlled centralized postage-issuing computer system of claim 124, further comprising a comparison module, operable with the data processing circuitry, the comparison module being programmed to compare the indexing tracking ID from the USPS postage indicium request with the indexing tracking ID of the retrieved postage indicium.

142. (New) The vendor-controlled centralized postage-issuing computer system of claim 124, further comprising a tracking number request module, operable with the data processing circuitry, and programmed to generate a vendor request for the indexing tracking ID.

143. (New) The vendor-controlled centralized postage-issuing computer system of claim 127, wherein the digital signature generation submodule is programmed to generate the digital signature from a data set that includes the indexing tracking ID and not a delivery zip code for the mail piece.

144. (New) The method of claim 97, wherein deriving the digital signature from the data corresponding to the postage indicium comprises deriving the digital signature from a USPS delivery confirmation code.

145. (New) The method of claim 85, further comprising:
comparing the indexing tracking ID of the retrieved data corresponding to the postage indicium with the indexing tracking ID received in the second postage indicium request from the USPS.

146. (New) The method of claim 145, further comprising:
transmitting, from the vendor-controlled centralized postage-issuing computer system to the USPS, an indication of whether the indexing tracking ID of the retrieved data corresponding to the postage indicium and the indexing tracking ID received in the second postage indicium request received from the USPS are the same.

147. (New) In a vendor-controlled centralized postage-issuing computer system, a method of processing a mail piece, comprising:
generating data corresponding to a postage indicium at a vendor-controlled centralized postage issuing computer system in response to the postage indicium request, the postage indicium being associated with a mail piece and configured for processing through the United States Postal Service (USPS), wherein the data corresponding to the postage indicium comprises a digital signature derived from a USPS delivery confirmation code;
storing the data corresponding to the postage indicium within a database of the vendor-controlled centralized postage issuing computer system such that the USPS delivery confirmation code is associated with the data corresponding to the postage indicium and the USPS delivery confirmation code is usable as an index for the data corresponding to the postage indicium;
transmitting the USPS delivery confirmation code the end user computer;

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receiving, at the vendor-controlled centralized postage issuing computer system, a postage indicium request transmitted from the USPS, wherein the postage indicium request contains the USPS delivery confirmation code; and

retrieving the data corresponding to the postage indicium from the database based on the USPS delivery confirmation code.